



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony in support of
Senate Bill 265, An Act Requiring Annual Reports Concerning Waitlists for the Rental
Assistance Program**

**House Bill 5332, An Act Establishing the Interagency Council on Homelessness
Housing Committee**

March 5, 2024

Good morning, Senator Moore, Representative Felipe, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. **The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 265, An Act Requiring Annual Reports Concerning Waitlists for the Rental Assistance Program, and House Bill 5332, An Act Establishing the Interagency Council on Homelessness.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. Over the past two years, the Foundation has distributed \$104.5 million in grants to promote equitable opportunities for all residents in our region. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families, and organizations, the Foundation has awarded grants of more than \$998 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our strategic commitment work with community partners to dismantle structural racism and advance equitable social and economic mobility for Black and Latine residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods. Higher opportunity neighborhoods are defined by a variety of factors, including low unemployment, better performing schools, lower crime, greater availability of quality, affordable housing.

The Foundation invests in efforts designed to increase the stability, availability, and quality of affordable housing in the Greater Hartford region; align and leverage additional investment in Hartford neighborhoods; and increase the social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods.

The Foundation and many partners throughout the state recognize that when people have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. **Given the need, the Hartford Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have supported this work for many years.**

According to [DataHaven's Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing 2023 Index](#), rising housing costs have exacerbated housing affordability issues; about a third of households are spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Forty-nine percent of renters are burdened by housing costs, with higher shares among Black (55 percent) and Latino (54 percent) renters. Rising housing costs are also reflected in increased eviction and homelessness rates. In late 2021, the DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey found that three percent of Black and Latino women and two percent of Black and Latino men in Connecticut said that they would have to leave their home in the next two months because they were behind on their rent or mortgages, compared to 0.5 percent of white women and 0.5



percent of white men. **If we are to sustain progress and continue tackling these and related challenges, the state must lead the effort to provide adequate resources to prevent and eliminate homelessness in Connecticut.**

To support these efforts, the Hartford Foundation is a part of the statewide HOMEConnecticut Campaign. The mission of HOMEConnecticut is to ensure everyone in Connecticut has access to safe, stable, accessible, and affordable housing in an equitable community of their choice. The Foundation looks forward to sharing what we are learning with legislators and state agency leaders working on these challenges.

Over the past several years, the Foundation has urged the legislature to increase funding for the state rental assistance program in recognition of rapidly increasing rents and a scarcity of affordable housing throughout the state. The lack of adequate affordable housing and supports has reached a crisis. **We are pleased to see and submitted testimony in support of the bill before the committee today that would increase funding for rental assistance.**

We believe that Senate Bill 265 would help determine the need for more rental assistance to qualifying applicants. For many years, the Foundation has heard from our housing nonprofit partners about the substantial unmet demand for rental assistance. The report could serve to build our understanding of the adequacy of RAP and related efforts by directing the Commissioner of Housing (in consultation with other agencies) to report information on the administration of waitlists for the rental assistance program on an annual basis. The report could include the utilization of rental assistance vouchers or certificates, numbers of departmental clients and number who has received rental assistance certificates, date of last opening on the list and other information. We also recommend the report discuss the length of time it is taking to follow up with people on the waitlist and frequency of contact. **As a partner in the effort to better meet this demand, the legislature would benefit from receiving regular updates on the number of people on rental assistance waitlists, as well as the length of time they have waited to receive it. With this information, the legislature can better assess housing needs state and track the state's ability to house people quickly.**

As part of our strategic work, the Hartford Foundation also supports basic human needs in our region, applying an equity lens to the systems and programs that address emergency shelter and homelessness diversion, healthy food choices, physical and mental health care, and the digital divide.

The challenge of rising homelessness in Connecticut requires a coordinated and systemic response that addresses the various challenges people face in finding and sustaining stable housing. Bill 265 recognizes the need for state agencies addressing basic human needs to work together.

Feedback from our grantees and the most recent data available reflect a need to double-down on homelessness prevention and diversion. Homelessness is an issue that impacts people in a variety of circumstances and if the state is going to be responsive, it needs to ensure that there is cross-agency collaboration and communication to develop and implement comprehensive systems of support.



For this reason, the Foundation also offers its support for [House Bill 5332 An Act Establishing the Interagency Council on Homelessness](#).

The Foundation remains committed to preventing and reducing homelessness in Greater Hartford by providing grants to organizations supporting people experiencing homelessness and by addressing systemic barriers to quality, affordable housing.

Each of the past several years, the Foundation has awarded approximately \$1 million to local nonprofit organizations that provide access to emergency shelter, housing subsidies, case management, eviction prevention and landlord negotiation, employment services, and other services to residents at-risk or experiencing homelessness. Today, our portfolio includes smaller, annual emergency assistance grants made to neighborhood organizations providing urgent food, clothing, financial assistance (i.e., rent and utility expenses) and domestic violence aftercare. In 2021, the Foundation began to offer flexible, multi-year core support grants to help service providers plan for longer-term initiatives and hire staff with greater confidence.

The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits, philanthropy, and residents to develop effective long-term policies that will ensure all Connecticut residents have access to safe, secure, and affordable housing. We look forward to sharing what we are learning with you.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfp.org or 860-548-1888.